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300314Z May 01

2001HOCHI00648 - UNCLASSIFIED

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	EVG-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01	EUR-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00
	VC-00	HHS-01	H-01	SSA-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	DCP-01	NSAE-00	OES-01	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SP-00	IRM-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	R-00
	SNIS-00	NISC-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/014W				

-----F20280 300321Z /38
FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5113

INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
AMEMBASSY VATICAN
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HO CHI MINH CITY 000648

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/JMARTIN
STATE ALSO FOR PRM

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STATE ALSO FOR DRL/IRF
STATE ALSO FOR USAID/SOULES
CINCPAC FOR FPA
SECDEF FOR ISA/EA/LSTERN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI PHUM](#) [PGOV KIRF](#) [KHIV VM](#)
SUBJECT: DOMESTIC NGOS IN HCMC

1. SUMMARY: AFTER 1975, VIETNAM'S COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT CLOSED OR TOOK OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOLS, ORPHANAGES, HEALTH FACILITIES, AND OTHER CHARITABLE AND SOCIAL FACILITIES IN SAIGON THAT PREVIOUSLY HAD BEEN MANAGED BY RELIGIOUS OR OTHER PRIVATE ENTITIES. IN THE PAST FEW YEARS IN HCMC, AND IN SOME OTHER PARTS OF VIETNAM, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ALLOWED A QUIET BUT REAL RESURGENCE IN BOTH THE NUMBER AND THE ACTIVITIES OF DOMESTIC, USUALLY RELIGIOUS, NGOS. ALTHOUGH THESE ORGANIZATIONS ACT OUTSIDE OF DIRECT GOVERNMENT CONTROL, SOME ARE ASSOCIATED WITH A GOVERNMENT OR PARTY AGENCY. THE EMERGENCE OF SUCH GROUPS PROBABLY REPRESENTS A GROWING TOLERANCE ON THE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS A GROWING RECOGNITION OF GOVERNMENT INABILITY TO MEET THE CHARITABLE AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF THE CITY. THIS REPORT PROFILES SOME OF THE NGO'S ENGAGED IN CHARITABLE AND SOCIAL WORK IN HCMC. GROUPS SUCH AS THESE, ESTABLISHED BY AND EMPLOYING PERSONS WITH A GENUINE ENTHUSIASM FOR WHAT THEY ARE DOING, MAY EVENTUALLY HELP VIETNAM CREATE A MORE CIVIL SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO CHARITABLE NEEDS AND SOCIAL CAUSES WITHOUT FEAR OF GOVERNMENT IMPEDIMENTS OR PUNISHMENT. END SUMMARY.

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FRIEND TO FRIEND CLUB

2. A FEW YEARS AGO, A HCMC HEROIN ADDICT (WHO PREFERRED NOT TO GIVE HIS NAME TO POLOFF) DISCOVERED HE WAS HIV-POSITIVE. RATHER THAN SUCCUMB TO FEELINGS OF DESPAIR, HE GAVE UP HIS HABIT COLD TURKEY, FOUND A FRIEND WHO SHARED THE SAME FATE, AND THE TWO OF THEM BEGAN TALKING WITH OTHER HEROIN ADDICTS THEY KNEW ABOUT THE DANGERS OF NEEDLE-SHARING. BEING FORMER ADDICTS, THEY WERE ABLE TO STRIKE CHORDS IN THEIR LISTENERS THAT GOVERNMENT OUTREACH PROGRAMS SIMPLY COULD NOT DO. THEY ENCOURAGED THEIR LISTENERS TO GIVE UP THEIR ADDICTIONS IF THEY COULD, BUT THEIR MAIN MESSAGE WAS TO STOP THE PRACTICE OF SHARING NEEDLES. SOON THEY BEGAN HOLDING MEETINGS AT A ROW HOUSE ON A SIDE STREET IN PHU NHUAN DISTRICT, CLANDESTINE

MEETINGS, SINCE A GROUP OF HEROIN ADDICTS MEETING TOGETHER AND DISTRIBUTING CLEAN NEEDLES WOULD INVITE ARREST BY LOCAL POLICE. OTHER ADDICTS AND FORMER ADDICTS VOLUNTEERED TO HELP. THEY CREATED A GROUP CALLED "FRIEND TO FRIEND CLUB."

13. TODAY FRIEND TO FRIEND IS FORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE HCMC AIDS COMMITTEE FROM WHICH IT RECEIVES FUNDING. IT HAS A STAFF OF 15 WHO RECEIVE A LIMITED SALARY AND A VOLUNTEER FORCE OF 100. MOST OF THE VOLUNTEERS ARE HIV-POSITIVE AND THREE QUARTERS OF THEM ARE LESS THAN 25 YEARS OLD. THE VOLUNTEERS GO HOUSE-TO-HOUSE, TO HOSPITALS, AND BY INVITATION, TO SCHOOLS, TO GIVE SUPPORT TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE HIV/AIDS, THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS, AND/OR CAREGIVERS AND UNCLASSIFIED

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TO GIVE ADVICE TO THOSE WHO ARE AT RISK OF ACQUIRING THE DISEASE. THEY CONTINUE TO HOLD MONTHLY MEETINGS AND TO BE A SUPPORT GROUP FOR HEROIN ADDICTS. THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE AIDS COMMITTEE HAS GIVEN THEM THE CAPABILITY TO OPERATE MORE OPENLY AND WITHOUT FEAR OF POLICE INTERVENTION.

THANH XUAN SHELTER FOR GIRLS -----

14. TWO CATHOLIC NUNS ESTABLISHED A SHELTER IN 1996 IN HCMC'S BINH THANH DISTRICT FOR YOUNG GIRLS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED LABOR EXPLOITATION OR SEXUAL ABUSE. TODAY, THE SHELTER IS OPERATED BY SEVERAL CATHOLIC NUNS AND LAY PERSONS AND IS HOME TO 22 GIRLS FROM THE AGES OF SIX TO FOURTEEN. THE GIRLS ARE EITHER ORPHANS OR COME FROM POOR FAMILIES WITH NEGLECTFUL, ABUSIVE OR EXPLOITATIVE PARENTS. (SOME OF THE PARENTS HAVE FORCED OR SOLD THEIR CHILDREN INTO PROSTITUTION.) AT THE SHELTER, THE GIRLS ARE PROVIDED FOOD, CLOTHING, AN EDUCATION AND A PLACE TO LIVE. RECOGNIZING THAT THE CHILDREN OFTEN COME FROM BACKGROUNDS WHERE THE NOTION OF "TRUST" HAS BEEN SHATTERED, THE NUNS AND LAYPERSONS AT THE SHELTER STRESS INTERDEPENDENCE BY HAVING THE CHILDREN SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES IN HOUSEHOLD WORK, HELPING EACH OTHER TO LEARN IN THE CLASSROOM, AND PLAYING TOGETHER. THE SHELTER HAS AN INFORMAL ASSOCIATION WITH THE HCMC COMMUNIST PARTY YOUTH UNION, WHICH PROVIDES COUNSELING TO THE GIRLS TO MAKE THEM AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS IN SEXUALLY EXPLOITATIVE SITUATIONS. IT ALSO IS ASSOCIATED INFORMALLY WITH THE HCMC WORK INSTITUTE, WHICH PROVIDES THE GIRLS WITH SOME TRAINING IN COMPUTER LITERACY, EMBROIDERY/SEWING, AND HAIR STYLING.

15. THE GOAL OF THE THANH XUAN SHELTER IS TO REUNITE THE CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES UNDER THE CONDITION THAT BOTH PARTIES ARE WILLING AND ACCEPTING OF ONE ANOTHER. ALTHOUGH 12 OF THE GIRLS ARE ORPHANS OR OTHERWISE CANNOT BE REUNITED WITH THEIR FAMILIES, OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, 24 GIRLS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY BEEN REUNITED WITH FAMILY AND LOVED ONES. FUNDING FOR THE SHELTER COMES COMPLETELY FROM PRIVATE DONATIONS, USUALLY FROM INDIVIDUALS.

FRIENDS FOR STREET CHILDREN ASSOCIATION -----

16. IN 1993, A CATHOLIC WOMAN TOOK THREE HOMELESS CHILDREN INTO HER HOME IN THU DUC DISTRICT. BY THE END OF 1995, UNCLASSIFIED

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SHE HAD TAKEN IN FOUR OTHER HOMELESS CHILDREN AND BEGAN TEACHING READING AND WRITING CLASSES TO THEM AND 13 OTHER CHILDREN IN THE DISTRICT WHOSE FAMILIES WERE UNABLE TO AFFORD SCHOOL FEES AND BOOKS. IN 1997, THE WOMAN AND HER SCHOOL BECAME A PART OF "FRIENDS FOR STREET CHILDREN," A CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION ESTABLISHED IN 1993 THAT RAN THREE OTHER SIMILAR SCHOOLS, THE OLDEST OF WHICH DATED BACK TO 1984. TODAY, FRIENDS FOR STREET CHILDREN MANAGES AND OPERATES SEVEN DEVELOPMENT CENTERS, WHICH ARE, IN FACT, SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN FROM FAMILIES TOO POOR TO AFFORD MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS. IT HAS A STAFF OF ABOUT 50 SOCIAL WORKERS, EDUCATORS AND NUNS, MOST OF WHOM ARE VOLUNTEERS.

17. IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS, THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ATTENDING FRIENDS' DEVELOPMENT CENTERS INCREASED FROM 520 TO 812. ABOUT 160 OF THE CHILDREN LIVE ON THE GROUNDS OF THE DEVELOPMENT CENTERS AND WOULD OTHERWISE SLEEP ON THE STREETS. THE OTHER CHILDREN LIVE AT HOME, BUT ATTEND CLASSES (AND ARE PROVIDED A MEAL) AT THE CENTERS. THE CENTER IN THU DUC DISTRICT IS NOW HOME TO 29 CHILDREN WHILE 76 OTHERS ATTEND CLASSES THERE. THE STAFF OF TWELVE TEACHERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS INCLUDES THREE DOMINICAN NUNS. IT IS THE GOAL OF FRIENDS FOR STREET CHILDREN TO PREVENT THEIR VULNERABLE STUDENTS FROM BECOMING STREET CHILDREN BY PROVIDING A BASIC EDUCATION AS WELL AS VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN EMBROIDERY, TAILORING, HANDICRAFTS, CARPENTRY AND COMPUTER CLASSES. FUNDING IS LARGELY DEPENDENT ON LOCAL INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS, BUT FRIENDS DOES GET SUPPORT FROM SOME INTERNATIONAL DONORS IN FRANCE AND JAPAN.

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9. THE HOUSE OF LOVE IS AN ORPHANAGE MANAGED AND OPERATED BY ONE BUDDHIST MONK AND ELEVEN BUDDHIST NUNS WHO RESIDE AT THE DIEU GIAC PAGODA IN HCMC'S DISTRICT TWO. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE SEVEN PAID STAFF (TEACHERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS) AND TWELVE LAY VOLUNTEERS. THE ORPHANAGE WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1989 FOR NEWBORN BABIES WHO WERE ABANDONED AT THE PAGODA (WHICH IS LOCATED IN ONE OF THE CITY'S POOREST AREAS). OF THE 101 CHILDREN CURRENTLY RESIDING AT THE ORPHANAGE, 30 ARE THREE YEARS OLD OR LESS AND 71 ARE FROM 4 TO 11 YEARS OLD. SEVENTY-NINE WERE ABANDONED AT THE ORPHANAGE, TEN ARE ORPHANED, AND THE REMAINING TWELVE GIVEN OVER TO THE ORPHANAGE FOR VARIOUS REASONS. ABOUT HALF ARE GIRLS AND HALF ARE BOYS. THE ORPHANAGE SENDS SOME OF ITS RESIDENTS TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS, BUT ALSO PROVIDES PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSES ON ITS PREMISES. FUNDING FOR THE OPERATION OF THIS ORPHANAGE COMES ENTIRELY FROM INDIVIDUAL PRIVATE DONATIONS.

OTHER CHARITIES

10. A CATHOLIC NUN IN BINH THANH DISTRICT RUNS AN ORPHANAGE FOR AUTISTIC AND MENTALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN. ANOTHER CATHOLIC NUN MANAGES AN ORPHANAGE AND SCHOOL FOR POOR CHILDREN FROM ONE TO EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD IN THONG NHAT DISTRICT IN DONG NAI PROVINCE. A GROUP OF DOCTORS AND NURSES HAVE ESTABLISHED THE BEN SAN LEPROSY TREATMENT CENTER IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE. A PRIVATE GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS OPERATES A HOME/SCHOOL FOR 44 BLIND PEOPLE (AGED 5 TO 29 YEARS) IN HCMC'S DISTRICT TEN. TWO WOMEN, ONE VIETNAMESE AND ONE WESTERN, RUN A SHELTER FOR HOMELESS GIRLS IN HCMC'S DISTRICT FOUR. A PRIVATE GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS CALLING THEMSELVES "CARE FOR CHILDREN IN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES" MANAGE A SHELTER FOR SEXUALLY ABUSED GIRLS AGED 12 TO 16 AND AN ORPHANAGE AND SCHOOL FOR 100 CHILDREN AGED 6 TO 16 IN DISTRICT FOUR. THE CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY OPERATE SEVERAL KINDERGARTENS IN HCMC, AND PRIESTS ASSOCIATED WITH NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL IN HCMC HAVE ESTABLISHED A SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB IN THE MEKONG DELTA.

COMMENT

11. THERE ARE LIKELY MANY MORE PRIVATE CHARITABLE AND
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SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS CARRYING OUT SIMILAR ACTIVITIES OF WHICH POST IS UNAWARE. THE ABOVE SHOULD SUFFICE, HOWEVER, TO POINT OUT THAT THE NUMBER OF NGO'S IN HCMC AND THE GOOD WORKS THEY ARE ACCOMPLISHING ARE ON THE RISE. POST APPLAUDS THE LENIENT MANNER IN WHICH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS PERMITTED THESE NGO'S TO OPERATE AND LOOKS FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN A CIVIL SOCIETY COMPRISED OF MANY DIFFERENT NON-GOVERNMENT ACTORS, PRIVATE CITIZENS AND PRIVATE GROUPS, BECOMES A REALITY IN VIETNAM.

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